

The University of Chicago

THE REACTION AGAINST RUSKIN
IN ART CRITICISM
ART AND MORALITY

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1938

By
CHARLES ALLEN YOUNT

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CHAPTER IV

ART AND MORALITY

The moot problem of art during the last three decades of the nineteenth century was its relation to ethics. Because Ruskin was considered the chief exponent of the idea that art is fundamentally an ethical expression and because attacks on the belief were frequently directed at Ruskin, some critics considered that his works were largely responsible for the question being raised. The first objective, then, is to determine his place in the controversy. Next to be considered is the relevance of Ruskin's use of a moral criterion in judging the value of art; his critics believed that in doing so he had confused criticism. Third, there were objections to his doctrine that art should serve a moral purpose. Fourth, there were refutations of his theory that noble art can be produced only by noble persons. Finally, critics challenged his assertion that a nation's art is an exponent of its national virtue.

In his review of Ruskin's first series of lectures at Oxford, Stopford Brooke stated, in 1870, that he hoped Ruskin, in the lecture on "The Relation of Art to Morality," had "laid down plainly what he meant on this vexed subject."¹ This statement indicates both the importance of the topic in contemporary discussion of art and Ruskin's writings and lectures as a focal point of controversy on the subject. That the subject was considered one of the chief problems of art is suggested by the comments of other writers. William Cyples, in 1880, said that "the question has long been disputed whether Art has any connection with morality, some of the most authoritative latest affirmations being that it has not."² It was a question which serious students of art

¹S. A. Brooke, Review of Ruskin's Lectures on Art, Macmillan's Magazine, XXII (1870), 428.

²William Cyples, An Inquiry into the Process of Human Experience (London, 1880), p. 784.

thought should be answered.

Yet the attempt to do so presented difficulties. When Symonds was searching, in 1888, for material for an essay on the subject he could find nothing which "treats the topic lucidly and fully." He found some "good things" in Ruskin's works but he could make little use of them because they were "penetrated by his peculiar views about it." All he felt capable of doing at the end of his search was to confine himself "to defining the limits of the inquiry," and putting as clearly as he could what seemed to him "the common sense view of the matter."¹ Another writer found as a further hindrance to clarification of the problem the fact that it was usually treated as a controversial subject. "It is true the considerations involved are neither numerous nor in reality very complicated, but owing to the acrimony and prejudice usually exhibited by both sides in this controversy, they have seldom been adequately or dispassionately discussed."²

This belief that there was a lack of material on the subject was a denial of Ruskin, who treated it in great detail. In his lecture on "The Unity of Art," published in 1859, he took note of the criticism that he was "trying to make art too moral."³ In Modern Painters the theme was constantly reiterated; one of the chapters of Volume III was devoted to "The Morality of Landscape." In his later work, he elaborated the doctrine and made even more extensive its application to all art. In early years he often qualified his statements. For example, in 1859, he met the charge that he had "made art too moral" with the explanation that morality is required only of the painter of nature. "I do not say in the least that in order to be a good painter you must be a good man; but in order to be a good natural painter there must be a strong element of good in the mind, however warped by other parts of the character."⁴ In his "Inaugural" as Slade Professor at Oxford in 1870, he announced that the relation of art and ethics would be the subject of his third lecture. He told his

¹Horatio F. Brown, ed., The Letters and Papers of J. A. Symonds (New York, 1923), pp. 209-10. The essay, "On the Relation of Art to Science and Morality," was published in 1893.

²"Art and Other Matters," Westminster Review, CLII (1889), 312.

³The Two Paths, Works, XVI, 310.

⁴Ibid.

listeners:

. . . . meantime accept this as one of the things, and the most important of all things, I can positively declare to you. The art, or general productive and formative energy, of any country, is an exact exponent of its ethical life. You can have noble art only from noble persons,¹ associated under laws fitted to their time and circumstances.

This passage Stopford Brooke challenged as not expressing Ruskin's thought clearly. Ruskin was misunderstood by many of his contemporaries, and certainly one of the main reasons that his conception of a moral basis for art was misrepresented by many people was the manner in which he wrote and talked. They were not conversant with the many subtle ramifications of his conception as he developed it throughout his works. The emphatic manner in which he made the above quoted generalization caused readers to remember it. His thought was far more subtle and complex than this statement would imply, but because of such positive statements Ruskin was identified with a moral concept of art. For those who accepted Ruskin's ideas, there was no problem to solve. They judged art by moral standards.²

For others, as for the Ruskinians, there was no problem. The propagandists of art for art's sake also denied that a problem existed because they saw no relation between morality and art. In 1899, John Runciman considered Bernard Shaw's approaching the question as a revival of "dead and forgotten Ruskinism." He looked upon the idea that art is moral as an age old fallacy which thrived "in the early and mid-Victorian period, when Ruskin flourished and guided annually some hundreds of promising young men to artistic perdition."³ George Moore in Modern Painting (1893)

¹John Ruskin, Lectures on Art, The Works of John Ruskin, ed. Edward T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-1909), XX, 39.

²Ruskin was not the first, even in his own age, to emphasize the morality of art. One of his principal doctrines, that only good men can produce great art, was the central doctrine of Pugin's Contrasts (1841). From this work, says Kenneth Clark, "we can date the whole attempt to judge a work of art by the moral worth of its creator." Ruskin was better fitted to become the popularizer of the doctrine because of his prophetic character and because Pugin's Roman Catholic religion was against him (Kenneth Clark, The Gothic Revival [London, 1928], pp. 188-89). Geoffrey Scott gives an account of earlier discussions of the problem in The Architecture of Humanism (New York, 1924), pp. 132 ff.

³John Runciman, "Neo-Ruskinism: a Protest," The Dome, New series, II (1899), 121.

tried to avoid "discussion on that sterile subject, 'morality in art.'"¹

But at the end of the century the problem, "Is art primarily an ethical expression?", remained for William Sharp "one of the most puzzling problems of Art." He recognized, as others did, that it was not a problem peculiar to his own time, and he thought that its appearance as a controversial issue was due to Ruskin's works and their influence. "It is the problem that in our time, largely through the genius of Mr. Ruskin, has come to be of paramount significance."² He thought the question would exist "as long as the ideals of art are as misinterpreted as they commonly are by, and particularly among, peoples whose response to Beauty as such, however manifested, is passive and receptive rather than swift and eager. . . ."³ The English people themselves, he felt, were not by nature fitted to appreciate art, but he also believed that Ruskin's influence had encouraged them to ask for moral edification from art.

The people who found a new interest in art through Ruskin approved his moral interpretation for the same reason that they approved his test of truth to nature and his antagonism toward science. Natural religion and Christian morality were both opposed to materialistic rationalism and experimental science. New pleasures could be found in art which bolstered their faith in absolute moral laws, and to these people Ruskin was primarily a moralist.⁴ That he was also regarded as an intellectualist without moral qualities is indicative of the confusion of critical opinion of Ruskin's early works. Lady Eastlake praised his intellectual powers but could find no benefit to morals in his writ-

¹George Moore, Modern Painting (New York, 1923), p. 225.

²William Sharp, The Progress of Art in the Century (London, 1903), p. 159.

³Ibid.

⁴In the Centenary Studies, Lawrence Binyon suggests that it was the word moral itself rather than the meaning which Ruskin attached to it that was the cause of objection. "The word has acquired a tame and joyless atmosphere; to artists it is apt to suggest merely the conventions of respectability; prudish, self-righteous and hypocritical people" (J. H. Whitehouse and others, Ruskin the Prophet [London, 1920], p. 74). The people to whom Ruskin was primarily a moralist were to a large extent responsible for these meanings being attached to the word.

ing.

Now, Mr. Ruskin's intellectual powers are of the most brilliant description; but there is, we deliberately aver, not one single great moral quality in their application: on the contrary, he appears so far more destitute than others, like himself, more intellectually than morally gifted men, of these higher aims, as not even to recognize the necessity for feigning them.¹

But for many of his readers his chief claim to attention was that by his application of moral criteria he had raised art to the place it should hold. For them his appearance was in response to a great need. Alexander Japp considered him "a genuine art-critic because he was so much more than that term had formerly been held to include," and he thought Modern Painters was great principally because of its moral teaching.

As inaugurating quite a new era of art-criticism, Modern Painters is valuable; yet, as has often been said, far less for this than for the moral lessons applied in it from beginning to end, and the deep glances it affords into the spirit of things.²

This writer believed that by "appearing at first merely as an art-critic" and further confining his criticism to the interpretation of Turner alone Ruskin had hindered the "full recognition of his greatness in that broader sphere he was at once destined and well fitted to fill--the sphere. . . . of the moral and spiritual teacher."³ The exaltation of his descriptions enabled his readers to interpret "nature's facts into their Divine or moral analogies"; he helped Peter Bayne to find in nature "not only the Divine incomprehensibility but the Divine kindness, never letting hope be extinguished in the world, or leaving man to the conviction that earth is his eternal grave."⁴ For these divines Ruskin's moral emotion was a bulwark against the fear that utilitarianism, science, and other forces of disillusionment had made life not worth living.

Writers on art, as well as the theologians, considered

¹Lady Eastlake (Mrs. Charles L.), Review of Modern Painters, Quarterly Review, XCVIII (1856), 210.

²Alexander H. Japp, Three Great Teachers of Our Own Time (London, 1865), p. 197.

³Ibid., p. 191.

⁴Peter Bayne, Lessons from My Masters (London, 1879), pp. 398-99.

Ruskin's influence a moral force. William Bellars in The Fine Arts, for which Ruskin wrote an introduction, pointed to Ruskin's example as a justification for treating art as a "great intellectual and moral agent."¹ He believed it necessary to agree with Ruskin's main contention, ". . . if we believe in any religion or moral responsibility at all, in holding that it is a duty incumbent on us to exercise the various faculties with which we are endowed in such measure and such directions as may tend most fully to develop our nature, and thus fulfill the design with which it has been bestowed upon us."² Dallas, also, considered that in explaining the moral bearings of art Ruskin had accomplished a task which called for great courage. By doing so Ruskin "made art-criticism for the first time intelligible to the English mind." To this fact he attributed Ruskin's great influence on artists as well as on the public.³ In 1891, after attacks had been made on Ruskin's moral interpretation of art, William Knight asserted that it was the moralist's point of view which had made his criticism "so varied and vital in reference to all the art schools of the world." He saw in Ruskin a perfect fusion of the moralist and art critic. Their chief value, as he interpreted Ruskin's works, lay not in his direct moralizing but in his indirect ethical teaching, his "subtle glances into the problems of duty," which had "lit up every foreground of the field of Art." To the critics who contended that Ruskin, the moralist, had degraded the position of art he replied: "Ruskin is not a moralist looking down on Art, or an art-critic keeping aloof from moral problems. He combines the two functions as they have never been combined before."⁴

The French critics of English art looked upon Ruskin's use of moral criteria as the distinctive aspect of his work. Analysing his writings in 1864, Milsand recognized the struggle between two tendencies in Ruskin, his search for the ideal and his perception of reality. The former was the reason for his at-

¹William Bellars, The Fine Arts (London, 1876), p. ix.

²Ibid., p. 6.

³E. S. Dallas, The Gay Science (London, 1866), II, 172-73.

⁴William Knight, The Philosophy of the Beautiful (New York, 1891), p. 219.

tempt to reduce art to moral values.

Et cependant dès cette époque j'aperçois déjà chez M. Ruskin toutes les tendances du moraliste. Tandis que l'influence de son âge, ajoutée à ses besoins intellectuels, le pousse vers un art qui ne vise qu'à rendre compte des faits, l'ensemble de son caractère le porte et l'oblige à évaluer toute œuvre humaine d'après l'état moral qu'elle manifeste.¹

Chesneau attributed the moral tendency of all English art to the influence of Ruskin. He thought Frenchmen could not expect to understand English art because of this fact.² In the sixties these French observers found Ruskin's moral sentiments a pervading influence in English art circles.

After the attacks on this influence increased there were those ready to defend the aims which Ruskin had assigned to art. "Art for man's sake" was much higher in the opinion of the Reverend S. Law Wilson than "art for art's sake." He expressed great horror at the idea of separating art from morality.

We never can consent to the monstrous principle that Art is to be emancipated from all moral considerations; that the artist is to have no ethical sympathies; that virtue and wickedness are to be no more to him than what the colours on his palette are to the painter, simply the means of producing a certain effect, and nothing more.³

How the Ruskinians appeared to a more sophisticated critic writing about the same time may be seen from the comments in a review of Ruskin's Verona and Other Lectures in 1884. The reviewer estimated that the following of Ruskin was as large then as it had been earlier, but that the character of his following had changed greatly. To replace the cultivated ones who had slipped away from his influence there were great increases in the "hordes of Philistines," to whom he had given "eyes and ears, often his, alas! not their own. . . ." It was not his literary power, usually considered the source of his wide popularity, which had achieved this but his moral approach to art.

No, his influence has lain in the quality which in some of its manifestations is not a pleasing one, which, indeed, is the chief cause of his alienation from a fastidious minority. Not of set purpose, but instinctively, he has used the one means that will always appeal to the great mass of his country-

¹J. Milsand, L'Esthétique Anglaise (Paris, 1864), p. 101.

²Ernest Chesneau, Les Nations Rivaless dans l'Art (Paris, 1868), p. 14.

³S. Law Wilson, The Theology of Modern Literature (Edinburgh, 1899), p. 28.

men and women. He has bidden them approach art through morality. Moral fervour, moral instruction, the constant mental attitude of teaching and preaching, are the root of his wide influence.¹

He conceded that Ruskin had given to these people a measure of appreciation of art which they would not otherwise have had, but in the opinion of a "fastidious minority" the combination of preacher and art critic confused the reader. For them, Mr. Pater had perhaps become "a finer, saner guide to the art of Italy."

This was one of the principal objections to Ruskin's work, that by introducing moral considerations he confused criticism and made appreciation of art difficult. His critics thought that his approaching art from a moralist's point of view often caused him to be prejudiced in his judgments. Also, they believed, it led him to look for qualities in a work of art which would illustrate his own particular interest and often completely neglect the qualities which were of primary interest to the artist himself. Placing ethical values above artistic values, they believed, destroyed the detachment which is necessary before the critic can become receptive to the meaning of a work of art. Criticism of art was beset with enough difficulties without adding the complicating factor of its moral bearings. Sully wrote with some sarcasm of Bosanquet's ranking of Ruskin and Morris among the great writers on esthetics. He considered Ruskin's writings a source of confusion. Sully conceded that Ruskin's theory of art might illustrate Bosanquet's idea of esthetic significance,

. . . . but does it not illustrate it by making the significance essentially moral? There are those who think that the whole tendency of Mr. Ruskin's writings is to confuse the ethical and the aesthetic to an even greater extent than Plato in the doctrine against which Mr. Bosanquet has so vigorously protested.²

He wondered whether the German "aesthetiker" would approve Bosanquet's placing Mr. Ruskin beside Hegel.

In developing his theory of beauty, Ruskin rejected the term aesthesis, which, because he associated it with "mere animal consciousness," he thought had been wrongly designated as the faculty by which we apprehend beauty. In opposition to it he employed the term theoria, which is contemplative and moral. His

¹"Mr. Ruskin's New Book," The Bookman, VI (1894), 114-15.

²James Sully, Review of Bosanquet's A History of Aesthetic, Mind, New series, II (1893), 115.

distinction between the two terms arose from his objection to sensuous pleasure as the object of art. He regarded sensuous enjoyment of both nature and art as bestial. Theoria, on the other hand, is "exultant, reverent and grateful" perception.¹ Though Ruskin found this distinction somewhat restricting at times, it remained the basis for his judgments of art. When he was preparing a new edition of Modern Painters in 1883, he reaffirmed the distinction and gave as one of the principal reasons for reprinting the book the fact "that it contains so early and so decisive a warning against the incipient folly, which in recent days, has made art at once the corruption and the jest of the vulgar world."² This was Ruskin's comment on those who were attempting to develop an aesthetic science and who had refused to accept his distinction.

His distinction, however, was criticized before the so-called "Aesthetic Movement" began. The Blackwood reviewer, in 1851, objected to limiting the experience of beauty to "something Divine." A beautiful object, he agreed with Ruskin, "does become a type to the contemplative and pious mind of the attribute of God. . . ." But to assert that the object is beautiful only because of this "is simply to falsify our human nature."³ In his book, On Beauty, published in 1858, Blackie admired Ruskin's intrepidity in rejecting aesthesis, but he considered Ruskin's mingling of the theoretic and the aesthetic a source of error. He pointed out that theoria means

. . . . perceptive with special reference to perception by the eye; and the derivative meaning, contemplative, speculative, or meditative, as opposed to practical, does not necessarily involve any of those strong moral feelings, the existence of which Mr. Ruskin considers as so essentially interwoven with the perception of Beauty. . . . I thoroughly agree with him, that the highest aesthetical culture can never exist without high moral culture; but I think that in this, as in other places of his very valuable works, he has shown a tendency to confound two distinct domains in a manner that leads sometimes to positive error, and at other times to grotesque exaggeration.⁴

Waldstein also considered Ruskin's desire to avoid the sensual

¹See Modern Painters II, Works, IV, 25 ff.

²Ibid., p. 35.

³"Mr. Ruskin's Works," Blackwood's Magazine, LXX (1851), 335-36.

⁴J. S. Blackie, On Beauty (Edinburgh, 1858), pp. 5-6.

connotations of aesthesis as a brave gesture, but felt that his reasons for using theoria indicated a failure to understand the real nature of art. The impressions which art produces, however spiritual they may be, "are necessarily bound up with the sense perception, in so far as they depend in their essence upon the form of the object or the sound which thus impresses us."¹

Symonds included the moralist with the hedonist and the naturalist as a cause of confusion in art criticism. He required of the art critic a judgment which must be "adjusted to the special nature of the thing criticized." Art has its own values and it will not do "for the critic of art to apply the same rules as the moralist, the naturalist, or the hedonist. The scope of his analysis must go beyond any of these fields."² He asked for complete knowledge and for complete independence of the critic. In the opinion of Bain, Ruskin's "severe asceticism" imposed an impossible task upon art criticism in attempting to draw the line between the interesting and the elevated. "Such judgments must in the end be a matter of opinion."³ Charles Whibley contrasted the "moral indiscretions of Mr. Ruskin" with the "balanced judgment of Sir Joshua." Ruskin's praise of the reverent purity of the Madonnas might be fitting for a sermon, he thought, but conscience and personal virtue have no relevance to criticism of art.⁴

Ruskin's theory implied that the critic must be endowed with a moral sensibility which will enable him to appreciate and comprehend the meaning of a work of art. In applying this theory he assigned to certain qualities in art symbolic meanings which were not present for those who did not have his moral point of view. His critics contended that he read moral qualities into art which they could not find and of which the artist was perhaps wholly unconscious when he created the work. His statement that colors, especially scarlet, were the "sanctifying element of visible beauty" seemed ridiculous to John Paget.

¹Charles Waldstein (Sir Charles Walston), The Study of Art in Universities (New York, 1896), pp. 75-76.

²J. A. Symonds, Essays, Speculative and Suggestive (London, 1893), p. 63.

³Alexander Bain, Mental and Moral Science (London, 1868), pp. 314-15.

⁴Charles Whibley, "Italian Art at the New Gallery," Nineteenth Century, XXXV (1894), 333.

Is a man with red hair better than a man with black? Are red noses "sanctifying elements of visible beauty, inseparably connected with purity of life"? And, above all, is the Scarlet Lady a type of purity? The attempt to connect moral excellence with external colour is like determining how far it is from London Bridge to Ladyday, or resolving the relationship between a bulldog and a window-shutter.¹

Some complained that Ruskin was able to find many noble qualities in Turner's work which were not visible to others. The skeptical critic, who was acquainted with the waywardness of artistic temperament, could find no basis in fact for his hero worship. The predilection of the artist for sensuous impression could hardly be made compatible with Ruskin's finding of moral values in his work. Ruskin's interpretations might be interesting, but the critics thought them the product of his imagination rather than his vision.

The questions for the critic are, first, how far this subjective and moralizing attitude is characteristic generally of the artistic temperament; next how far in this or that particular case the artist is likely to have had moral motives in view. On the general question we can only note that the extreme susceptibility to external influences proper to the artistic temperament, its predilection for what has been called the "concrete surface of the world," is likely to leave little room for the tendencies of abstraction and reflection. With regard to the particular question:--in reading Mr. Ruskin's pregnant commentaries, the most delightful things ever written in their kind, on the works of Tintoret or Turner, the first question which occurs is, how much of all this was intended by the painter, and how much has been read into his work by the commentator? Several reasons concur in leading us to give the lion's share to the commentator.²

To a new generation, which had come into contact with the French attitude toward art, Ruskin's exaltation of the moral beauty in Turner's works seemed beside the point. Henley pointed out in 1888 that in contrast to the superstitious awe with which Turner was regarded by the "Ruskin-reading populations" he was not greatly esteemed on the Continent. He blames the moralistic interpretations of Ruskin for the reaction which had set in against Turner, but he believed Turner's greatness was demonstrated by the fact that he had "survived the enthusiasm of Mr. Ruskin." If the reaction removed Turner from the pedestal upon which Ruskin had placed him, "the result for him that is enamored of art--who looks

¹John Paget, "A Day at Antwerp: Rubens and Ruskin," Blackwood's Magazine, XC (1861), 369.

²"Art and Morality," Westminster Review, XCI (1869), 156.

upon paint as so much visible beauty, and is not concerned with its moral significance or its unpictorial suggestiveness" was to assign to him the proper place in art which he deserved.¹ The Francophile, Lady Lilith Wardour, a character in a satiric dialogue by Mallock, voiced the objection of the art for art's sake critic to the Ruskinian's demand for moral meaning from Burne-Jones' paintings.

I think you try to read a meaning into the pictures that is not there.

Is there any moral shut
Within the bosom of the rose?

These pictures are meant themselves to be factors in life's enjoyment, not to teach us lessons about it. They are specimens of art for art's sake. Look at the exquisite coloring, the exquisite workmanship. Look, for instance, at the painting of the tapestry in the 'Laus Veneris.'²

Such misunderstanding of the purpose of art could not, one reviewer thought, be excused in a critic of Ruskin's reputation.³

In the opinion of some critics, Ruskin's reading of moral meanings into works of art led him to approach them with a prejudice. Quilter, an art critic for The Times and various periodicals, wrote in 1883 that Ruskin "had been led away by the necessity (the fancied necessity) of tracing a special moral and religious principle throughout."⁴ It was this "theological bias," he thought, which caused Ruskin to "refuse the name of art to works in which the morality appears to him to be false or even wanting."⁵ Waldstein, also, found Ruskin's demand for moral and religious values a source of error in his theory of art, and he thought "the radiation from this false centre of vision has put out of focus many of the points with which he deals in detail." By starting

¹W. E. Henley, Views and Reviews (London, 1908), p. 127.

²W. H. Mallock, "A Familiar Colloquy on Recent Art," Nineteenth Century, IV (1878), 296.

³Review of Hamerton's The Life of J. M. W. Turner, Edinburgh Review, CLI (1880), 47. Hamerton attributed Turner's fame largely to the writings of Ruskin, but he thought that they were not of great benefit in understanding Turner's art. He saw the danger of a reaction against Turner because Ruskin had emphasized other than purely artistic qualities in his art (P. G. Hamerton, The Life of J. M. W. Turner Boston, 1889, pp. 316 ff).

⁴Harry Quilter, Preferences in Art, Life and Literature (London, 1892), p. 123.

⁵Ibid.

from the position that all art is revelation and praise, he thought Ruskin introduced a religious bias which would retard apprehension of truth. He questioned whether there were any universally accepted explanation of man's feelings for beauty and thought that a determination of the true facts of esthetics would "in itself be a high moral act, pleasing to God."¹

Waldstein was more sympathetic toward science than Ruskin; he believed that Ruskin's religious and ethical considerations led not to "answering of the question 'what is true?' but 'what is holy,' or 'good,' or 'good for,' or 'better,' or 'worse?'" Waldstein believed the truths of art must be looked for in the "earliest and simplest sensations of man, not only in his highest state of civilization, but in his crudest stage of intellectual development." But he thought Ruskin's moral prejudice prevented him from going to the roots of sensation and led him to judge art rather than to understand it.

For him the early sensations are not the simple fundamental factors with which the theorist has to deal dispassionately; but they are viewed in the light of the moral teacher to whom they are the lower as compared with the higher thoughts and feelings, which latter often really are mystical and fanciful rhapsodies. . . . The really fundamental question concerning the nature of our sense-perceptions in their relation to our feelings of form and beauty he slurs over hastily in a few pages, and then takes up his favorite strain in dealing with "the temper by which right taste is formed," rather than with the real question, what right taste is or ought to be.²

In his view, Ruskin's emphasis on the judicial function of criticism was a cause of confusion.

This emphasis on judgment led Ruskin to establish absolute standards for judging. He was opposed to a relative standard by which it is often impossible to say that a work of art is good or bad.³ Nettleship felt that this demand for an absolute good or bad was a pernicious influence in criticism and prevented many people from being able to understand art. Because of the moral requirement for truth, they were unable to comprehend the difference between the actual and what the artist represents, and he considered many of the intellectuals as bad as the Philistines in this respect. His earnest concern with the problem in a letter to Bradley (1889) indicates the place which it occupied in per-

¹Charles Waldstein, The Work of John Ruskin (New York, 1893), pp. 32-33.

²Ibid., pp. 36-37.

³See above, p. 13.

sonal discussion.

I sometimes begin to wonder whether it is any good trying to expound the relation of art to morality. And yet one knows that is just the thing about which people are most apt to go wrong, and also just the thing about which they are most bothered if they think at all. I think what I should like to make people feel is that, so far as they are really in an "artistic" state of mind, they cannot be in an "immoral" state.¹

McCarthy believed Ruskin was so accustomed to think in terms of an absolute good or evil that he could not escape from the belief. He thought the "cardinal error of Ruskin's career" was his belief "that the morality of art exactly corresponds with the morality of human life; that there is a central law of right and wrong for everything, like Stephen Pearl Andrew's universal science, of which when you have once got the key you can open every lock-- which is the solving word of every enigma, the standard by which everything is finally to be judged."²

Closely linked to Ruskin's moral conception of art was his feeling for nature. It was his love for nature that led him to seek the same values in art, and he found in nature the source of all nobility in art. Leslie Stephen believed that Ruskin's finding a moral in "scenery" was an error. "After all, is the 'love of nature' so clearly a religious or moral sentiment?"³ He thought that in attempting to show that Bryon's love of nature derived from his moral sensibility, Ruskin had used his ingenuity to no good purpose.

Ruskin's practice of using objects in nature as symbols of virtue seemed ludicrous to some. In a parody, similar to those inspired by Erasmus Darwin's Botanical Gardens, a writer poked fun at Ruskin's unusual titles and his meticulous attention to natural detail. The writer gives only a part of a supposed lecture by Ruskin on "Arrowroot." At the end of the lecture, the writer has Ruskin complain that the English people do not eat enough meat and vegetables and that lentil soup should not be substituted for them; expensive foods are noble.

I have pointed out tonight that the meat and vegetables which

¹R. L. Nettleship, Philosophical Lectures and Remains, p. 94.

²Justin McCarthy, Modern Leaders (New York, 1872), p. 187.

³Leslie Stephen, "John Ruskin," The Living Age, CCXV (1900), 427.

you have despised--nay, which you are daily despising--go to form part of the body; and that the brain is a part of the body; and that on the brain all just conceptions depend. So far we found that the scientist was with us. I left him dazed and trembling, hesitating on the verge of conclusions which I have not feared to state quite plainly. If you forget every other word that I have said, remember at least those conclusions; for I do feel that they are significant and important for every one of us. I will state them once more. The brain life increases with the amount we eat. If we would have just conceptions, we must devour seven solid meat-meals a day.¹

As the century neared the close, the interest in scenery diminished. There were several factors which caused this reaction. Whistler had taught the art-conscious public "how to appreciate the beauty and wizardry of cities" and metropolitan life was satisfied with the artificial.² Science had brought about a more objective attitude toward nature. Such writers as Robert Louis Stevenson had described a more robust nature and had abandoned the religious attitude of Ruskin.³ Francis Grierson saw a beauty in nature which had no ethical sympathy for man and took no account of his social economy.

She is indifferent to everything except the struggle for life and beauty. But in the struggle towards the beautiful there is no moral aim. . . . From the beginning she has striven for an expression of beauty, whether wise or ignorant, malignant or beneficent; and this principle lies at the base of the whole idea of creation, the one force acting in, through, and over all, ignoring the ethical idea developed by man, unconscious of his religious sentiment, blind to the scruples of civilization, indifferent to the moral code and the moral character.⁴

¹"The Sincerest Form of Flattery," Cornhill Magazine, New series, XV (1890), 369.

²See Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen-Nineties (London, 1913), p. 128.

³In his essay, "Roads," Stevenson discussed the taste for landscape. It was difficult for him to put his feeling for nature into words and he may have been thinking of Ruskin when he wrote of the dangers of refining on the feelings inspired by nature: "There is a dangerous vice in any such refining upon vague sensation. The analysis of such satisfactions lends itself very readily to literary affectation; and we can think of instances where it has shown itself apt to exercise a morbid influence, even upon the author's choice of language and the turn of his sentences." Notes and Essays, Works (London, 1924), XXIV, p. 313. Originally published in Portfolio, November, 1873.

⁴Francis Grierson, Modern Mysticism (4th ed.; London, 1914), pp. 25-26.

Grierson believed that moral codes are relative to religion and custom and the moralist, conforming to them, fails to see the changeless beauty of an implacable nature. Nature was still a source of great interest in art and literature, but the new generation of nature lovers were not interested in "the moral of landscape."

Ruskin did not require that art should teach morality directly, but some of his statements gave the impression that he thought this the chief purpose of art. One of his early definitions of the greatest art, "that which embodies the greatest number of the greatest ideas," was often interpreted as meaning that art should enforce a moral.¹ From his judgments of artists in Modern Painters, also, readers obtained the impression that he conceived the primary mission of art as moral. After he developed his social theory of art he always emphasized the ethical aim. Thus, many of his contemporaries interpreted him to mean that the purpose of art is moral improvement.²

Among the first critics to consider this question was Lady Eastlake, who had condemned Ruskin for his failure to appreciate the moral values in art. She interpreted Ruskin's ridicule of Claude and Gaspar Poussin as due chiefly to his failure to find a moral purpose in their work. His conception of art as a vehicle for thought she considered the basic error, a conception which "must force upon art a moral and not a pictorial responsibility." It resulted in the demand for a false emotion which art could not supply; therefore, she denounced his doctrines "which so mischievously misrepresent the real mission of art."

Whether sacred or historical, landscape or domestic, art was not given to man either to teach him religion or morality; and wherever he is found professing to learn one or the other from her, something worse than that spiritual indifference which Mr. Ruskin laments--namely, false and morbid fervours--and something worse than that human interest he despises--

¹Modern Painters I, Works, III, 92.

²Swinburne, who appreciated Ruskin's advice and criticisms of poetry, could not understand his "combining philanthropic morality with such exquisite sense of what is right and good in things far higher than any matter of right or wrong selon les mœurs." He considered it an act of forbearance to tolerate this attitude of Ruskin, who "actually intimates that genius ought to devote itself to the help of humanity and to overwhelming its idols. . . ." (quoted from a letter to Dante Rossetti (1863), first published in Georges La Fourcade's La Jeunesse de Swinburne [Paris, 1928], II, 334).

namely, cold and selfish abstractions--will be found. As the minister of those ineffable pleasures which stand in sweet reconciliation midway between these senses and the soul; as the stirrer of those humanizing emotions which harmonise equally with man's highest spiritual aspirations and his commonest daily impressions--which have none of the dangers of selfish sensibility or the penalties of false excitement;--as all this, and infinitely more, art is indeed to be looked upon as a gift of inappreciable price to a race who need those pure pleasures which recall their forfeited innocence, quite as much as those moral lessons which point to its loss; but beyond this she happily gives and teaches nothing.¹

The "pure pleasures" which she asks of art might seem to be a way of stating the art for art's sake point of view. However, it was not the ideal of Whistler and his followers which she voiced, but rather the opposition of the academicians to Ruskin's attempt to establish new standards for art.

In defending his theory of art as the science of pleasure, Dallas encountered the influence of Ruskin, "the modern critic who has the strongest objection to pleasure as the end of art." Taking issue with Ruskin's statement that the arts end in death "when they are pursued or possessed in the sense of pleasure only," he pointed out that Ruskin himself had defined art as the "expression of man's delight in the works of God." The difference between them arose in the analysis of the source of expression of delight. Dallas considered the delight itself as a sufficient motive for expression in art, in contrast to Ruskin's conception that pleasure in art has its origin in moral emotions.

Why is delight expressed except for delight? There is not only no objection to saying that art is the expression of delight, but also the statement of that fact is essential to the true conception of art.²

The application of a moral test to pleasure in art, he believed, prevented a true appreciation of the aim of art. It destroyed spontaneity in expression and appreciation. In developing what he regarded as a scientific approach to pleasure, he anticipated the theory of hedonics which Marshall advanced later in Pain, Pleasure and Aesthetics (1894).

In so far as pleasure has been at all a subject of discussion, it has been chiefly regarded from the moral point of view. People have been inclined to raise the question, not so much what is pleasure? or what are its laws? as what is the good of it? or is it allowable? These questions, and the discus-

¹Lady Eastlake, op. cit., pp. 219-20.

²E. S. Dallas, op. cit., pp. 119-20.

sions they raise, have nothing to do with science. Just as the question, May I look at this or that? is it morally right for me to open my eyes? are of no account in the science of optics; so in a science of pleasure all questions as to the moral right or wrong and good or bad of pleasure-seeking are nothing to the point.¹

Dowden, also, objected to making morality the end of art. Recognition of the supremacy of conscience, he said, does not mean that conscience "enacts the laws of every form of human activity." It may censor any mental activity which is antagonistic to its own laws, but the appreciation of beauty does not have its source in moral feelings. The moral sentiment can be only a secondary effect: "The judgment, 'This is beautiful,' is quite distinct from the judgment, 'This is right.'" Morality and religion, therefore, "are no more the direct ends of art than they are the ends of chemistry or engineering."² On this basis of separateness of function a writer in the Westminster Review maintained the independence of art from morals. The object of the fine arts, he believed, was to produce a certain kind of pleasure which is forfeited if they are required to teach virtue. Moral qualities in art may become beautiful only when they produce the kind of pleasure which art is capable of producing.

The objects of ethical emotion only pass into the objects of aesthetic emotion by removal to a distance, where they can do no good; the virtues of monk and soldier, patriot and martyr, the lives of saints, nay, the dealings of God himself come into the same class with the colour or the fold of a garment by no other right than because they are pleasant to think upon in exactly the same way as the colour or the fold is pleasant to look upon.³

In his opinion, to ask that art produce a moral response from the observer would mean that it must call the will into play, and such a reaction would destroy contemplative appreciation of beauty.

Vernon Lee made a distinction between literature and the plastic arts in respect to their capacity to utilize moral emotions. Even in fiction the term beautiful may be applied to moral impressions only on the basis of the pleasure they excite. She held that "the thing which gives us the specific aesthetic impression exists. . . . in its absolute reality only in the domain of the

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²Edward Dowden, "French Aesthetics," Contemporary Review, I (1866), 286.

³"Art and Morality," Westminster Review, XCI (1869), 167.

senses and of the sensuous impressions recalled and reconstructed by the intellect," and it takes on a moral connotation only by analogy. Only "such moral effects as give us an unmixed, direct utilitarian pleasure," similar to those produced by the senses, can therefore be called beautiful. The satisfaction which is obtained from observing the working out of a character in a novel is "as purely scientific as the satisfaction in following a mathematical demonstration or a physiological experiment." If these moral emotions do arise they can be called beautiful or ugly in a metaphorical, not an esthetic, sense.¹

The principle of contrasts in literature requires the use of virtue and vice, which may have a moral effect. But in its application to the other arts no moral sentiments are produced by its operation. "A dark background, necessary to throw a figure into full light is as much a part of the beautiful whole as the figure in the light. . . ." ² She could not agree with Ruskin's concept of a moral element in beauty itself. The fine arts may employ subjects which have moral significance, but the subject itself has nothing to do with the expression of beauty.

I have always laughed at the Ruskinian idea of morality or immorality in architecture, or painting, or music, and said that their morality and immorality were beauty and ugliness. I have done so because moral ideas don't enter into the arts of line, or colour, or sound, but only into the subjects, to which their visible and audible works are (usually arbitrarily) attached.³

John Addington Symonds held a similar view. The morally good, he thought, can be called beautiful only "by a metaphor" and the beauty for which art strives is not a moral effect. Art and morality may be inseparable in the abstract, but in their concrete expression they are separate, and may even be antagonistic. "Art . . . may produce forms which are physically beautiful, but which stimulate appetites or suggest thoughts alien to moral rightness."⁴

¹Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), Baldwin (London, 1886), pp. 202-04.

²Ibid.

³Vernon Lee, "A Dialogue on Poetic Morality," Contemporary Review, XXXIX (1881), 693.

⁴J. A. Symonds, "On the Relation of Art to Science and Morality," Essays, Suggestive and Speculative, p. 105.

Some of the students of mental science thought that art may serve a practical but not a moral purpose. Cyples explained that "so long as Art keeps the sense impressions on which it relies large and noble" it has no relation to morals. He believed that its chief purpose is to develop the personality to its highest capacity. The practical person may wish to dispense with art but he does so "at the risk of becoming narrower from sheer lack of the larger habituations of the nervous-apparatus which it gives. . . ."¹ Bain thought that art should lull the "angry and hateful passions" as a part of its pleasure-giving function. "Hence it allies itself with morality; being in fact almost identified with the persuasive part of morality, as opposed to the obligatory or compulsory sanction."² These psychologists evidently included art in their systems of knowledge only for the sake of completeness.

The strongest opposition to requiring that art serve a moral purpose came from those who were associated with the art for art's sake movement. There was no well defined movement in England as there was in France. Some English writers adopted the term and used it as propaganda in defense of their own work as well as in criticism of the moralizing tendency of Victorian art and literature. Among the active campaigners were George Moore, Whistler, and Wilde. All three were closely associated with the movement in France, where they each lived for a time. They not only employed French ideas in their own work, but argued that the only way to achieve a vital art in England was to make the artist free from conventional moral attitudes, as they supposed him to be in France.

Others were associated with the theory because their work seemed to some critics to lack the moral values which they believed essential in art or because it was thought that their work would have a corrupting influence on English life. Among these were Dante Rossetti, Swinburne, Pater, and Beardsley. These men were primarily concerned with freedom of expression in their own art and gave little thought to reforming English conceptions of art. When Robert Buchanan attacked the poetry of Swinburne and

¹Cyples, *op. cit.*, p. 755. The highest service of art is "to fragmentarily exercise the Ego-actualizing apparatus, preparing larger-habituations in its use for conduct." *Ibid.*

²Alexander Bain, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

Rossetti as an immoral influence, Rossetti wrote an article replying to the charge and condemning the critic's bad manners.¹ This argument aroused public interest in the relation of morality to literary work. One writer in giving the "excuses" of a man charged with writing an immoral book summed up the issues of the controversy:

One is that the book is perfectly moral; another, that it has nothing to do with morality; a third, that it is not written for children but for men; a fourth, that if it does not express the morality of the Philistines and prudes, it embodies a higher morality, which lies outside the poor old Ten Commandments. The accused sums up his general position by saying that art and morality are two different things, and that a critic has no business to judge a poem by the rules which he would apply to a sermon.

But many believed that a writer should be held strictly accountable for the effect his work might have on public morality.

In the fine arts the argument involved similar issues. It was believed that the art for art's sake theory reduced art to a matter of mere technical skill. To subordinate the spiritual and humanizing values of art to technical problems was, in the view of many Englishmen, to belittle art. Baldwin Brown cited the authority of Xenophon and Socrates for requiring a moral purpose in art, but he recognized the opposing view:

In opposition it is urged, and urged with considerable force, that this importation of moral ideas into art opens the door to sentiments and prejudices which may easily be destructive of sound criticism. A work of art, it is said, must be judged on artistic grounds alone; if it is good art, this is all we ought to require of it. This contention that art stands by itself, and exists, as the phrase goes, for its own sake, is in English minds especially associated with the art school of France, where artists as a rule in choosing their subjects seem to care only that the situation shall be striking, and where critics are content if these situations are represented with force and technical skill.³

Although he protested against the militant use of moral ideas in

¹Buchanan published an article, "The Fleshly School of Poetry," under a pseudonym in the Contemporary Review, October, 1871. Rossetti's reply, "The Stealthy School of Criticism," was published in The Athenaeum, December 16, 1871. In 1872, Buchanan expanded his essay into a booklet, The Fleshly School of Poetry (London, 1872), and included Swinburne. He had satirized Swinburne and others in a series in The Spectator in 1866 under the title, "The Session of the Poets."

²"Art and Morality," Cornhill Magazine, XXXII (1875), 91.

³G. Baldwin Brown, "Modern French Art," Nineteenth Century, VIII (1880), 56-57.

art, he believed that the lack of a higher aim was a serious defect of French art and praised Ruskin's criticism for its soundness on this point.¹

To what extent was the art for art's sake propaganda a product of reaction against Ruskin? Some of those connected with the idea were at one time closely associated with him, Rossetti and Swinburne, for example. But some who found inspiration in Ruskin's early writing, later found cause to oppose his ideas. Ruskin emphasized the moral value of art more strongly in his later works, and the younger men were acquiring new views of art. Wilde's explanation, in 1880, of the younger generation's break with Ruskin indicates that the reaction was a conscious one.² They adopted the art for art's sake idea as eagerly as young men had hailed Ruskin in the fifties. Their objection to Ruskin, according to Wilde, was that "the keystone of his aesthetic system is ethical always."³

Wilde was the chief publicizer of the art for art's sake doctrine, but many of the ideas came from Pater. In Pater "the younger school" found an authority to set up against Ruskin. In practically all respects he was the direct opposite of Ruskin. In contrast to Ruskin's activities in public life, Pater spent most of his life in seclusion as a fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford. As a critic he did not attempt to persuade others to agree with him; he engaged in no controversies. He did not tell others how and where to find beauty; he merely explained how and where he himself found it.

Pater's criticism of art was impressionistic; he emphasized the effect which a work of art has upon the critic. He did not

¹In his manual, The Fine Arts, published about ten years later, he adopted a more defensive attitude toward the art for art's sake propaganda. He did not deny "that there may be formal aesthetic pleasure without dependence on any intellectual or moral element." However, he contended that its error was in pretending "that such formal pleasure is the only legitimate gratification to be derived from art--that we adopt an inartistic attitude when we recognize or look for in a work of art any elements appealing to thought or sentiment" (The Fine Arts [New York, 1891], pp. 157-58). This change indicates the headway which was made by the art for art's sake idea in the decade from 1880 to 1890.

²See above, p. 46.

³Oscar Wilde, "L'Envoi," in Rennell Rodd's Rose Leaf and Apple Leaf (Portland, Maine, 1906), p. 6.

attempt to judge it on the basis of the good or bad which it contains; he did not search for noble ideas. His main question was: "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to me?"¹ In order to discover their meaning, Pater believed the critic must experience the concrete facts of art for himself. He need not try to explain beauty, as Ruskin did in Modern Painters, but he should be able to analyse his impressions if he experiences the work of art strongly. Pater had no test of truth to nature by which the artist's moral worth may be determined.² Moreover, Pater's aim was to find the sensuous pleasure in art, the kind of pleasure which Ruskin thought great art should not convey. If the critic of art trains himself to be susceptible to these pleasures, he will regard works of art, nature, and human life simply "as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar and unique kind."³ Acquisition of the power to experience this sensuous pleasure, Pater considered "success in life."⁴ All of Pater's criticisms were the application of this idea, and his analyses of works of art became the source book for those who argued against the Ruskinian's requirement of moral purpose in works of art. Wilde found the "sensuous element of art" illustrated in Pater's criticism.⁵

Pater did not directly contribute anything to the argument over the morality of art; his importance in the controversy consisted in his example. Wilde, however, made use of every opportunity to insist upon the independence of art from morality: "The

¹Walter Pater, The Renaissance (London, 1888), p. x.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. xi.

⁴Ibid., p. 250. The celebrated "Conclusion" which contains this statement was removed from the second edition in 1877, four years after the first edition, because of protests against its possible effects on morals. It was restored in the third edition in 1888. Pater did not mean that his statement should be taken literally (see Helen H. Young, The Writings of Walter Pater [Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1933], p. 125).

⁵In his argument against metaphysics in "The Critic as Artist," The Writings of Oscar Wilde (New York, 1931), V, 188-89, the character Gilbert says: "Who, as Mr. Pater suggests somewhere, would exchange the curve of a single rose-leaf for that formless, intangible Being which Plato rates so high?"

aim of art is simply to create a mood."¹ The dreamer, who is the real artist, seeks emotion for the sake of emotion. The basis for morals is in the organization of society; for its own perpetuation society requires of each member productive labor. It cannot forgive the dreamer.

The beautiful sterile emotions that art excites in us are hateful in its eyes, and so completely are people dominated by the tyranny of this dreadful social ideal that they are always coming up to one at Private Views and other places that are open to the general public, and saying in a loud, stentorian voice, "What are you doing?" whereas "What are you thinking?" is the only question that any civilized being should ever be allowed to whisper to another.²

This is Pater's conception of criticism pushed to the extreme. Wilde exalted the experience of art above experience of the facts of life. "Even a colour sense is more important, in the development of the individual, than a sense of right and wrong."³

One significant result of Ruskin's work was the change which it produced in the attitude of the public toward artists. Until his exaltation of Turner there were no contemporary artists among nineteenth century heroes.⁴ Thackeray's picture of a follower of high art in The Newcomes represented a common conception of the artist. Painting might be a cultural attainment for a young woman and a few might attain reputations as portrait painters or become members of the Royal Academy, but painting was not a high calling in popular opinion until Ruskin made it so. By emphasizing the moral and social significance of art he added dignity and nobility to the position of the artist.

In Ruskin's theory the conception and execution of a work of art involves the same moral processes as appreciation. The power of the artist's imagination depends upon his contemplative faculty, which is quickened and energized by moral emotions. Ruskin said that great art is "the expression of a mind of a God-made great man."⁵ His theory of creative artistic activity was complex, but it was popularly interpreted to mean that in order to

¹Ibid., p. 194. ²Ibid., pp. 186-87. ³Ibid., pp. 234-35.

⁴William Allingham suggested to Carlyle when he was thinking of writing a life of Michaelangelo that he go to Kensington Museum to study his sculpture. Carlyle replied, "We need only glance at that" (E. R. and J. Pennell, The Whistler Journal [Philadelphia, 1921], p. 175).

⁵Modern Painters III, Works, V, 189.

achieve greatness in art, the artist must live a noble life, and that by realizing nobility in his work he would act as an influence for public good. His comments on the artists themselves in his criticisms tended to confirm this deduction. This was a vulnerable point: he frequently made inferences about the life of an artist from his work which could be disproved by reference to history. It imposed upon the artist a moral responsibility, which many thought was incompatible with the artistic temperament.

Ruskin was never very definite in his exposition of this idea, and since he placed so much emphasis upon it, critics thought that he should make his position clear. A sympathetic and experienced critic, Stopford Brooke, attempted to discover precisely what his idea was in one of his most important lectures on the subject, but without satisfaction. Considering Ruskin's statement, "You must have the right moral state or you cannot have the art," he complained that it "is either too vague a definition or means that the whole state of any artist's moral character must be right or he will not produce good work," a statement which he thought everyone could cite examples to disprove. He anticipated Ruskin's reply that the artist is not properly understood through his work, and proceeded to test Titian's life by Ruskin's own statement of the requirements of a moral life. The results clearly proved Ruskin's error in making nobility in art depend on the nobility of the artist's character.¹

Brooke thought that the tenderness of Vergil and the severity of Pope, which Ruskin considered an expression of their moral attitude, derived rather from their mastery of literary conventions and technique. Ruskin found evidence in the work of Mantegna and Veronese of the ethics of their ancestors. Brooke believed it much more plausible that their skill as painters was the result of their study of their predecessors in art. It seemed to him highly improbable that an artist's skill or genius is determined either by his own ethical qualities or those of his ancestors.

The ethic state into which Ruskin demands that he be placed may not be an ethic state at all. His absolute power of touch says, it is true, that neither the artist himself nor his parents were desperate drunkards or imprudent sensualists, that they kept their physical frame in fine order. But does that prove his morality or that of his parents? A calculating

¹S. A. Brooke, op. cit., p. 428.

sensualist who is prudent in his indulgences, may have a healthier body than the man who has fought against sensualism all his life. A man may be a liar or thief, and his bodily powers be in exquisite harmony. Fineness of race does not prove an antecedent morality nor perfection of handling an artist's truth or honesty.¹

Brooke had great admiration for Ruskin, but he was convinced that Ruskin's theory that only moral men can produce great art was not true.

Digby Wyatt found the same difficulty in seeing Titian and Correggio as examples of virtue. Ruskin had praised them for their ethical qualities in a lecture before the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1865.² When Wyatt began the Slade lectures at Cambridge the same year that Ruskin began at Oxford, he felt it necessary to protest strongly against Ruskin's doctrine. Cambridge students must avoid the fallacy.

I would distinctly desire to guard you from falling into the popular error of supposing that perfection in art can come only from perfection in life and morals. It has been too much the custom in writing of things of beauty to regard the artist producing them, as though in their achievement he had effected an intentional moral good. That he may have done so is of course possible; that he must have done so is inadmissible.³

William Sharp made an extended contrast of the lives of Turner and Calvert to prove the fallacy of Ruskin's doctrine, which he thought had caused mistaken ideas of art. He considered the contrast necessary in order that the

. . . . greater public which does not yet understand art can come to see that noble moral ideals and a life of ideal conditions, mental, spiritual, and material are not in themselves enough to constitute genius. It is in the implicit inculcation of this doctrine that the great and noble Ruskin, just lost to us, has induced a radically false element into the public attitude towards art, and into many contemporary manifestations of art itself.⁴

He paints a sorry picture of Calvert, who, though he lived an "ideal art life" and was "sustained from the first and in every phase of his life striving by thought, word and deed to live up to those ideals," became a "faithful failure" and could exert but

¹Ibid., p. 430.

²The opinion was expressed in discussion after the lecture. See a report of the discussion in "The Study of Architecture," *Works*, XIX, 40.

³Digby Wyatt, *Lectures on Fine Art* (London, 1870), p. 267.

⁴William Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

little influence in the art world. Turner, on the other hand, "who was without ideals of life and conduct and socially narrow, selfish, . . . and sordid," became the greatest painter of his country.¹ It is more important for excellence in art that the artist should have

the perfect utterance, the master hand, the rhythmic thought of the man who is first and foremost the poet or the painter or the musician, rather than that he should be actuated by too high ethical ideals or exhibit a beautiful morality of life.²

This exposition of the art for art's sake ideal in a book which was designed for popular appeal indicates the extent of the reaction, at the time of Ruskin's death, against his once widely accepted doctrine.

Charles Eastlake thought that there might be some question about the morality of artists of the past, but he saw no relation between the artist's private life and his work in nineteenth century England.

To what extent morality and art were allied in the Middle Ages, or at what other periods of the world's history, may be doubtful. What we do know is, that in the nineteenth century, a bad artist is not infrequently a very good Christian, and that an indifferent Christian may be an excellent artist.³

He agreed that it might be of benefit to society if all the artists were good men but their moral uprightness, he thought, would have little effect on their art. But some people judged contemporary art on the basis of knowledge of the artist's life. Whistler's bohemian habits explained for some the radical qualities in his art. The character, Violet Staunton, "with the perfect face and the imperfect reputation," in Mallock's "Familiar Colloquy," was sure, however, that Whistler "kept the second commandment." When Gage Stanley remarked that Ruskin had said "all great artists must be moral," she replied that she was "afraid their biographers would hardly bear him out."⁴

What kind of an environment is most productive of art? Artists were traditionally thought to live on a sensuous plane, but the Royal Academicians had become models of respectability

¹Ibid., p. 160.

²Ibid., p. 155.

³C. L. Eastlake, A History of the Gothic Revival (London, 1872), p. 271.

⁴Mallock, "A Familiar Colloquy on Recent Art," op. cit., p. 292.

and pillars of society. Some critics found in this fact the reason for the lack of originality in English art; Bohemianism had its advantages and permitted the artist to live a natural life. Brooke believed that holding the artist to a strict moral accounting for his actions and feelings could debase and stifle his art.

. . . . noble conceptions in an artist's work only presuppose some moral elements in his character, and it is not seldom the case that when an artist's moral state is absolutely right, there is want in his work of healthy naturalness, of fire and warmth, of bold representation of human life. He is likely to be overawed by his own morality, he is likely to direct his work to a moral end as his first aim; and that would be the ruin of Art.¹

Originality in art was thought possible only because the artist is superior to middle class virtue. The failure of the bourgeoisie to understand art, Hamerton explained, arose from the fact that they judged the artists' motives by what they themselves saw in art. "Young officers, young attorneys, young cotton manufacturers, have, as a general rule, little right to reproach young painters with licentiousness." Their principal error was that they did not understand the "artistic spirit," which is not at all concerned with ethical problems and can treat moral or immoral subjects with equal objectivity. The Philistine calls a work of art immoral because he

. . . . sees immorality where none was intended, and, as he sees nothing else, imagines that the work was produced only for immoral purposes. On the other hand, the artist, who was aiming at some artistic triumph, some masterly feat of drawing and arrangement of forms, thinks no more about the immoral conduct of his figures than a girl thinks about the sensual behavior of flowers she gathers in her garden.²

The free artistic spirit can not tolerate the pettiness of middle class conventionality. Hamerton said he had never come in contact with a "thorough bourgeois mind which had the least understanding of art." The bourgeoisie are offended at the "grandeur of the high artistic spirit" and would not care to have a mutilated antique in their parlours. The Bohemianism of the artist was simply his revolt against the narrow conventionality of the middle class.³

¹Brooke, op. cit., p. 430.

²Hamerton, Thoughts about Art, p. 196.

³Ibid., p. 94. But Hamerton would hardly have sanctioned George Moore's revolt against respectability; he believed that "the life of the artist should be a practical protest against the

Ruskin's emphasis upon the social value of art laid a heavy responsibility upon the artist. If he is to produce good art he must not only live ethically but he must also utilize his powers for moral ends. Ruskin himself did not require an outright didactic motive in the artist, but his judgments of art and his comments on artists encouraged the impression that he did. One reviewer obtained this impression from reading The Stones of Venice, and protested that it is not the business of the artist to preach; no one expects an artist to improve his moral condition.

If the sculptor succeeds in awakening in our minds pure and elevated thoughts by the representation of graceful and beautiful forms, we consider that he has fulfilled his task. It is the architect's business to fill us with a sense of comfort and security in our dwelling-houses, and of national greatness in our public buildings; but we do not expect him to combine with his proper functions those of preacher and minister of the gospel.¹

Symonds likewise denied that the great artist ever works from "a consciously ethical point of view." He may inspire moral effects through the spirit of his work but "he has no didactic purpose." He is satisfied with creation and what he creates "may be of various sorts in regard to truth and goodness."²

The artists, especially those who took their cues from France, felt that the demand for a didactic purpose lowered the dignity of their work. It subordinated their individual powers to an ideal which they could not acknowledge as sovereign; they claimed the independence of the scientist. Whistler challenged Ruskin's interpretation of the great masters:

No reformers were these great men--no improvers of the ways of others! Their productions alone were their occupation, and, filled with the poetry of their science, they required not to alter their surroundings--for, as the laws of their Art were revealed to them, they saw in the development of their work, that real beauty which, to them, was as much a matter of certainty and triumph as is to the astronomer the verification of the result, foreseen with the light given to him alone. In all this, their world was completely severed from that of their fellow-creatures with whom sentiment is mistaken for

so-called decencies of life; and he can best protest by frequenting a tavern and cutting his club" (Confessions of a Young Man [Modern Library edition; New York, 1925], p. 142).

¹Review of The Stones of Venice, Fraser's Magazine, XLIX (1854), 127.

²Symonds, Essays, Speculative and Suggestive, p. 108.

poetry; and for whom there is no perfect work that shall not be explained by the benefit conferred upon themselves.¹

Ruskin's unstinted praise of a few of his favorites for their noble aims seemed narrow to the younger generation of artists. His teaching restricted their study to a small group of artists and even to limited aspects of their work. Historical study had revealed many new facts of which Ruskin took no account. A young French painter in a dialogue by Harrison summed up the charges of the younger artists against Ruskin. He admitted that Ruskin had stirred up the last generation, but felt that he had not helped later artists.

. . . . we have passed entirely beyond his range. He knows almost nothing of what art has been doing outside of England in the last thirty years--hardly enough to denounce it with intelligence. France, Germany, even America and Spain have given us new lights since *Modern Painters* was finished; and we have a wholly new school of aesthetic philosophy which is not bound to worship Fra Angelico and the early Middle Ages as the sole source of true art. Art is its own religion, its own morality; and we want neither Bible nor missal to teach us how to paint. It is the business of the artist to show men what he sees, what they might see if they were artists, to show them everything and anything that can be seen as he sees it. It is the business of the priest and the schoolmaster to teach us what is holy, or pure, or true. Now Ruskin is priest and schoolmaster first, and artist afterwards; and thus his place may be in the pulpit but certainly not in the studio.²

Wilde not only demanded that the artist be free from ethical purpose but considered that "ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style."³ He conceived that an artist whose work was praised by the English press immediately upon its appearance as "quite intelligible and highly moral" would question "whether in its creation he had really been himself at all, and consequently whether the work was not quite unworthy of him, and either of a thoroughly second-rate order, or of no artistic value whatsoever."⁴

The artist's choice of subject and his manner of treating it were subjects involved in the discussion as to whether the

¹Whistler, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

²Frederick Harrison, "Unto This Last," Nineteenth Century, XXXVIII (1895), 959.

³Oscar Wilde, "Preface," The Picture of Dorian Gray, Writings, III, 5.

⁴Wilde, The Soul of Man under Socialism, Writings, V, 36.

artist should have a moral purpose in his work and whether his private life affects his art. Consideration of the subject matter of art occupied an important place in Victorian art criticism. The reason for the popularity of Gothic architecture lay partly in the belief that the construction of Gothic had a more ennobling effect on the workman than other styles. The Camden Society published several pamphlets urging the masons "to live holy and serious lives" in order that they might build good buildings.¹ Ruskin ranked Gothic above other styles of architecture because he believed that it permitted the workman to use the forms he found in nature with most freedom and therefore with greatest majesty and nobility.² He believed that the morality of the mason is plainly discernible in his work.

Likewise, in painting, Ruskin insisted that to portray nature rightly, the artist must have moral sensitivity. This requirement included the representation of the nude. His condemnation of Rubens' "sensuality" in Modern Painters undoubtedly caused many people to regard Rubens' nudes as immoral, and his own opinions were regarded as prejudice against the use of the nude, especially by contemporary painters.³ Also, his tendency to excuse faults in execution if he could discover in the subject matter a suggestion of moral teaching and his rejection of Greek

¹Kenneth Clark, op. cit., p. 220.

²The Stones of Venice, II, Works, X, 215 ff.

³Ruskin admitted the difficulty of distinguishing by "what minute differences the right conception of the human form is separated from that which is luscious and foul." He thought that Michelangelo and Giorgione had treated it properly; whereas Rubens and Correggio were definitely sensual. He condemned contemporary study of the nude, especially in northern countries because people were not accustomed to seeing the naked human body. He said that every nude in modern art "looks as if accidentally undressed; and hence, from the very fear and doubt with which we approach the nude, it becomes expressive of evil, and for that daring frankness of the old men, which seldom missed of human grandeur, even when it failed of holy feeling, we have substituted a mean, carpeted, gauze-veiled, mincing sensuality of curls and crimping-pins out of which, I believe, nothing can come but moral enervation and mental paralysis" (Modern Painters, II, Works, IV, 194 ff.). This criticism in 1846 of Victorian conceptions of moral propriety exhibits Ruskin's insight. In 1872, in the lecture on "The Science of Organic Forms" he reasserted essentially the same views and condemned Mulready's nudes (The Eagle's Nest, Works, XXII, 235). By this time English artists were treating the nude more freely, and Ruskin's attitude seemed prejudiced to them.

sculpture and Dutch painting because he thought they exhibited the lack of the right moral state on the part of the artist indicated that his moral point of view distorted critical appreciation.

Among earlier critics of the doctrine of the noble subject was Hamerton, who distinguished between a moralistic and an artistic interest in subject matter. A woodcut designer might be interested in a street scene which would illustrate a moral, but an artist interested primarily in beauty could hardly be expected to find his subject in such a scene.¹ When Hamerton wrote his essay, "The Reaction from Pre-Raphaelitism," in 1864, he merely noticed that Ruskin had lamented (in the Academy Notes of 1857) that the Pre-Raphaelites were forgetting that "nobility of subject is a main thing in painting." When Hamerton was collecting the essays in 1873 to publish them in book form, he added a note to this passage, condemning the principle of the noble subject because the history of art would not support it.

Many of the very finest pictures by masters of former centuries have had for their subjects the most commonplace incidents of life, and many of the best works of contemporary artists go to prove that if a subject is pictorial, it need not deeply exercise the intellect. . . . What the subject of a picture may be matters exceedingly little if only it is pictorial, and if the subject is not pictorial, then the painter has no business with it.²

Even in religious painting, in which the artist might be expected to use didactic motives, the history of art indicated that artists had chosen their subjects without much regard for the moral teaching of the subject. Many religious artists, in the opinion of a critic writing in 1869, have done no more than take a subject suggested by religion which they have combined with other subjects and made them both serve the end of beauty.³ If the religious artist were concerned with morality he would select some other means than art for conveying his thought.

Edification and mental light, and all the subjective bearings of the things represented, can be better conveyed by another means; their objective aspect, and the delights of form and color can be conveyed by no other means. Hence, if this or that feature in a work of art has to be accounted for, it will be safer to account for it on the motive peculiar to the artist, the desire for beauty, than on any motive peculiar to the

¹P. G. Hamerton, Thoughts about Art (Boston, 1874), p. 221.

²Ibid., p. 190.

³"Art and Morality," Westminster Review, XCI (1869), 172.

moralist or thinker.¹

The finest of Christian painting reveals the artist's interest in the physical man, "man in possession of bodily perfection," rather than "man as a moral being."² Charles Whibley also condemned the attempt to judge the value of religious art on the basis of the morality of the subject and he blamed Ruskin for the fact that some people tried to do so. That the great artists of the Italian Renaissance selected religious subjects was merely accidental and did not imply that they were teaching morals. He thought it much more accurate to assume that they were just as worldly as their contemporaries. In any case, moral virtue has nothing to do with art. "Would the Ruskinite have us believe that in that most turbulent age the painters alone were spotless? And how should their spotlessness affect our judgment, when their works appeal directly to the eye?"³ The critic was much more outspoken in 1894 than the critic of the sixties in his condemnation of Ruskinism because he felt that Ruskin's influence had hampered appreciation of great art.

R. A. M. Stevenson was more restrained in censuring the effect of the demand for a noble subject upon appreciation of art, but he felt that a great deal of harm had been done to the understanding of Rubens by the doctrine of a noble subject. He thought that "temperament" might enter into a consideration of the value of an artist's subjects, but not moral qualities. The artist is an individualist and social regulations cannot supply "direct motifs for the figure painter, still less for the landscape artist." The artist must be free to express what he sees and feels according to his temperament, which is not affected one way or the other by "rules of self mortification," and the attempt to judge artistic value on the basis of the morality of the subject can only result in failure to understand the real values of art.

Restraint baulks the temperament that leads to direct and passionate acts in life, but it very little affects the feelings to which one gives expression in art. In fact, people should not closely consult men's lives for the reasons of their artistic performances; the man of genius speaks of feelings that, whatever they may be, have always been suppressed by the world.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 156.

²Ibid., p. 176.

³Whibley, op. cit., p. 334.

⁴R. A. M. Stevenson, Peter Paul Rubens (London, 1898), p. 6.

Stevenson believed that the artist must have complete freedom in his choice of subjects.

For Rubens this meant the nude. Stevenson defended Rubens' treatment of the nude and expressed his contempt for those who "turn round Rubens like a sanitary inspector sniffing about the apertures of a suspicious system of drainage."¹ He did not hold Ruskin responsible for this attitude, but he objected to another view "held by Ruskin and all those who get their views of painting from the study and practice of literature. According to them, the moral tone of a painter must be considered the main cause of his work, and painting should be a method of preaching which should be prefaced with a prayer." He thought much harm had been done to Rubens' reputation by the prejudice against the nude.²

Poynter, who based his theories upon his own experience as an artist, thought that Ruskin's requirement of a noble subject was determined by his concern with the effect of a painting on the observer and that it did not take account of the creative problem of the artist. He did not deny that there may be moral value in impressions of beauty but he objected to the theory that moral qualities are inherent in the forms of nature, which only the great artist can perceive and represent.³ Such a theory, he felt, did not explain the fundamental nature of the artist's power to produce beauty, which is essentially the result of his training as an artist. Ruskin confused "the faculty by which we may all derive a moral benefit from a humble contemplation of the infinite beauties and wonders of creation, with that artistic faculty which frames for us and forces upon us the perception and appreciation of those generic beauties which are not obvious to the unexercised or unperceiving mind." If Ruskin were right the man with the greatest moral sensibility would be the greatest artist and the artistic faculty would be of minor importance.⁴

In a lecture in 1872, Poynter made an elaborate apology for advancing ideas in opposition to those of Ruskin, but he was moved to do so because he thought Ruskin's criterion of a noble subject would lead to "false conclusions in art."⁵ There was no

¹Ibid., p. 5.

²Ibid.

³E. J. Poynter, Lectures on Art (London, 1880), pp. 78-79.

⁴Ibid., p. 80.

⁵Ibid., p. 78.

deference in his lecture in 1875, "Professor Ruskin on Michelangelo." He ridiculed Ruskin's objection to the nude in painting, which he attributed to moral prejudice:

If Mr. Ruskin could speak his real mind about the Last Judgment it would probably be something to this effect: "I deny the right of Michelangelo not only to treat the Last Judgment in a way in which it does not appeal to me, but I deny his right to treat the nude figure at all; I have never cared to study the nude figure, and have no perception or appreciation of its beauty; when I speak of the glory of nature and of God's works, I exclude the human figure both male and female, and refer you to the mossy rocks and birds'-nests, sunset skies, red herrings by Hunt, robin redbreasts, anything you like, in fact, but the figure for its beauty."¹

He attributed to Ruskin the prevalent feeling that anyone who paints the nude figure must delight in "the body for its own sake (a terrible crime, truly)," and pointed out that great artists in all great periods of art have done so.²

The gradual emancipation of women in the later decades of the century from the strict moral conventions which prevailed during the fifties and sixties, and the studies of the psychology of the sexual relationship between man and woman were influential in producing a change in attitude toward the question of what subjects are legitimate for treatment in art. By 1898, Edward Carpenter could assert that the treatment of sex was a "grand subject" for art, and he thought that its suppression in literature since the Elizabethan writers had "led to the enfeeblement of all the highest works in English literature."³ He considered the "redemption of sex" one of the greatest works which any artist of the time could perform. In painting, this work meant a healthy representation of the nude without the artist's concealing his delight in the body:

The painter who shall first succeed in rendering the nude on canvas boldly and freely in this respect, and yet harmonious-

¹Ibid., pp. 234-35. Poynter's listing of the natural subjects which were common in English painting indicates the reason for his objection to Ruskin's influence on English artists. He felt that Ruskin's naturalism had led the artist to depend too greatly upon symbolic devices for representing the moral aspects of nature, and had induced an "indifference on the part of the artist to any forms of beauty than those which are at once obvious to the uneducated mind" (ibid., p. 220).

²Ibid.

³Edward Carpenter, "The Human Body in its Relation to Art," Angels' Wings (London, 1913), pp. 80-81.

ly and sanely in relation to all the other human faculties, will have achieved a work which can scarcely be said to have been attempted since the time of Michel Angelo.¹

The criticisms of Ruskin's requirement of a noble subject prepared the way for much more freedom in the selection of subjects for art. But the older artists were wary and did not attempt to lead the British public. Criticism was in advance of creative art.

Complementary to the belief that the quality of art depends upon the moral sensitivity of the artist was the belief that the environment in which the artist works plays a large part in forming his character and hence in determining the moral value of his art. This idea was the basis for Ruskin's statement that "the art, or general productive and formative energy, of any country, is an exact exponent of its ethical life."² Ruskin discovered the ethical tone of a nation in its art. The theme of The Stones of Venice is the decay and corruption of Venetian architecture which accompanied the decay of national morality. Wealth and the love of luxury, according to Ruskin, debased the artistic ideals of Venice during the later Renaissance period.³ Ruskin reiterated this theme in The Political Economy of Art (1857), in the Rede Lecture at Cambridge, and in Unto This Last (1860). Throughout his later work it was an important theme, and the concept came to be identified with Ruskin.

An initial difficulty which some students of history saw in Ruskin's theory was the problem of determining the ethical condition of a nation. Leslie Stephen complained that Ruskin's methods for the study of social history were not adequate, especially when he was attempting to demonstrate that a condition of moral depravity prevailed. He felt that Ruskin's peculiar temperament prevented his considering all the factors that might enter into the problem.

The complex question of the moral value of different civilizations is not to be settled off-hand by quoting all the striking instances which an acute intellect combined with a

¹Ibid. Carpenter was one of the group who attempted to popularize the idea that morals are an art. "Copy book morality" has nothing to do with art but, as related to life, morality is the greatest of arts (ibid., p. 46).

²Lectures on Art, Works, XX, 39.

³The Stones of Venice, III, Works, XI, 134 ff.

fervid imagination and disturbed by an excessive irritability can accumulate in proof of human weakness.¹

This criticism in 1874 was directed in particular against Ruskin's first Oxford lectures in which he had stressed the relation of national morality to national art. Stephen pointed out that national morality could exist among people who are insensible to beauty; the hymns of the Dissenters express deep religious emotion but they can not be called beautiful. "Indeed, we should take but a sad view of the world if we held that its artistic attainments always measured the moral worth of a nation"; artistic races were hardly better morally than the Puritans.²

Moreover, the lack of a uniform development in all the arts at the same time was against Ruskin's theory. Frederick Harrison thought Ruskin's theory failed to take account of the complexities of artistic development.

The arts of form often flourish amidst hideous defilement of life; the arts of form are decaying just when the arts of poetry or music are at their purest and sweetest; and the art of building is often in its decadence, whilst the art of painting is sound and true. I cannot reconcile these contradictions, and I do not find that you [Ruskin] help us. Some of the most exquisite bits of Italian painting that you have shown us how to love, uniting, you say, religion and realism, breathing all virtues and all tenderness, were painted in and for a society³ which is described by Machiavelli and personified in Borgias.

Wyatt, in his Slade lectures at Cambridge in 1870, referred to the theory as "tall talk" and he feared that it would "engender false ideas of historical facts, and an entirely mistaken application of means to ends in the theory and practice of fine arts."⁴ He objected to the idea that greater morality and justice prevailed in the Middle Ages because their art supposedly reflected a more pious attitude toward life than that found in other periods.

¹Leslie Stephen, "Mr. Ruskin's Recent Writings," Fraser's Magazine, LXXXIX (1874), 697. John Morley in an article, "On Compromise," in the same year warned against the danger of fanaticism in the study of the history of morality and urged a "wise suspense in forming opinions and wise reserve in expressing them" (Fortnightly Review, XXI [1874], 425-54).

²Stephen, "Mr. Ruskin's Recent Writings," op. cit., p. 694.

³Frederick Harrison, "Past and Present," The Choice of Books (London, 1886), p. 139. The article was first published in Fortnightly Review, July, 1876. See also "Art and Morality," Westminster Review, XCI (1869), 177.

⁴Wyatt, op. cit., p. 269.

What is true of the individual artist is yet more true of the schools to which he belongs, and the existence of even high beauty in historical monuments of art, whether of architecture, sculpture, or painting, must not be accepted as necessarily proving a highly religious or moral condition of humanity at the date, or in the country, in which such works are produced.¹

And Poynter, in a consideration of Ruskin's theory in 1872, suggested that even if it could be demonstrated that "the best art has arisen out of a pure state of national faith and domestic virtue, it does not follow that these conditions will always produce good art." The first requisite for great art is a love of beauty, and he doubted that it could be instilled into the English and Scotch.² As for Ruskin's hope of improving English art and teaching the English to appreciate art by improving moral and social conditions, Whistler considered such a program hopeless, "built upon fable, and all because 'a wise man has uttered a vain thing and filled his belly with the East wind.'³

The issue of the effect of national morality upon art was frequently raised in connection with English opinions on contemporary French art and literature. Ruskin himself consistently condemned French painting in his own time if he took any notice of it at all. He believed that it had exercised an evil influence on English painting.⁴ Also, in 1881, he considered contemporary French fiction unhealthy because French writers used indecent subjects, and their novels were the result of "a fever which signifies the ungoverned excess of any appetite or passion."⁵ A follower of Ruskin, William Bellars, saw in French art evidence for the theory that "the tone of feeling which pervades a nation's Art will naturally be in some degree of that which characterizes the national life." His judgment of French art in 1876 exhibits the Ruskinian's distrust of French morality. "The popular French Art of the present day, with its sickly men and women, engaged in the frivolities, and exhibiting the hysterical passions of an altogether artificial mode of existence is the normal outcome of the actual condition of French society. . . ."⁶ English exponents

¹Ibid., p. 268.

²Poynter, op. cit., p. 84.

³Whistler, op. cit., p. 139.

⁴Aratra Pentelici, Works, XX, 309.

⁵"Fiction, Fair and Foul," Works, XXXIV, 376.

⁶Bellars, op. cit., p. 285.

of the art for art's sake were considered as tainted by French Bohemianism.¹

The criticism of French artistic ideas arose in connection with Swinburne's translations and imitations of French poetry. To adopt sin as a subject for any kind of art seemed an immoral act to many English. Commenting on the outcry against Swinburne, one critic asked that his poems be considered from the point of view of their value as art rather than for their moral implications. "Consideration of the moral issue of such work, of its effect on practical life, we renounce any right to admit; we must judge of the matter by a purely aesthetic standard."² He felt that this warning was needed because in England "literature has been too long in the habit of dictating to bewildered art what she should do and what she should not do"; and he denied that art must fulfill the requirements of the moralists "who have demanded from her wisdom and counsel and high lessons on nature and destiny."³

Whistler went to England directly from France in 1863 and did much to remove the prejudice against French painting in England. He was a friend of Swinburne, George Moore, and Wilde, who helped disseminate his views of art. George Moore declared that his eulogies of the French Impressionists in Confessions of a Young Man (1886) were the first written in England.⁴ R. A. M. Stevenson also helped to stimulate appreciation of French art in England and praised English imitators. In reply to the charge that the English Impressionists' painting was "baseless novelty," and an "ephemeral fashion," he submitted a long list of artists who were bringing about an advance in painting. He asserted that

¹Patric Geddes, Every Man His Own Art Critic (Edinburgh, 1888), p. 21.

²"Art and Morality," Westminster Review, XCI (1869), 181. In 1866, the year in which Swinburne's Poems and Ballads was published, Dallas defended the use of sin in art; he noted that "poetry and art have not always been content with angels' food. Art can be tolerant of sin so long as it blushes. If its blush and secret shame be gone; then for art, because it wants the sense of secrecy, its charm is gone" (Dallas, op. cit., p. 183).

³"Art and Morality," Westminster Review, XCI (1869), 181.

⁴George Moore, "Preface," Confessions of a Young Man (New York, 1917), p. vii.

English landscape painters had abandoned the Ruskinian view; contemporary art, he said, was "a logical outcome of the past, read in the light of a genuine change of feeling about nature."¹

This growth of a new spirit among artists was an important factor in making the men of the nineties more conscious in their revolt against Ruskinism. Ruskin taught that art is closely related to life. His emphasis on the moral bearings of art was an outgrowth of his intense social consciousness and his conception of morals was that of the mid-century. In the last decade of the century a new conception of morals prevailed, and art was considered by many as without the moral and social significance that Ruskin had assigned to it. In an essay written at the beginning of the decade, Symonds stated a view of art which signified the divorce of art from other activities.

But what distinguishes art from religion or from life is, that its subject-matter must assume beautiful form, and must be presented directly or indirectly to the senses. Art is not the school or the cathedral, but the playground, the paradise of humanity. It does not teach, it does not preach.²

The trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 caused some reaction in moral attitude, but it did not influence ideas of art extensively because Wilde was not taken seriously by many as a commentator on art. Although Ruskin's books circulated widely during the nineties and his conception of a moral basis for art appealed to many, the reaction in art circles against the central tenet of his theory of art was fairly complete by 1900.

¹R. A. M. Stevenson, "The Growth of Recent Art," The Studio, I (1893), 10.

²Symonds, Essays, Speculative and Suggestive, p. 83.

